Hope Against Hope

Why Progressivism is as Useless as Leftism

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The decision to turn this piece into a zine is dedicated to my younger self. Starry-eyed and so determined to change the world that they couldn’t feel the wind in their hair and the beautiful songs that compelled them to dance. I still love you, you were a pain in the ass though. Carpe momento, mea amor.

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Steal this zine dude, seriously.

I. No Time For Progress

The land is dying, but it looks like spring. This winter’s weather seems lost, as if the Earth itself had grown senile and forgetful. It isn’t the old age of winters past, when the years themselves die into renewal. The winter now seems cold and unrelenting, brutal, brought down by ill-health and left alone with no way to care for itself. Rain that should have fallen long and hard by now is yet to come, the mud that would be found this time of year chokcd in dust. The scrubjays, normally scarce, have gone entirely, only to be replaced by other birds from farther south. The sight of these new birds, themselves lost to their habitual terrain, is as eerie and disturbing as the daffodils blooming here at the end of January. I am afraid of the winter daffodils. They mean the death of the land.

And yet, while frightened, I also recognize a certain power of the Earth, which is itself always more than death. Life, once begun, once discovered and unleashed, cannot be undone, cannot be lost. Death can come for living things, but life itself is endless. For every misshapen circumstance we bring and every rhythm we destroy, life will find a new way. It will heal its wounds

and continue on, wrapping its patterns, its life ways, and its newly innovated rhythms around time itself, pulling eternity into an exuberance that shuts out all particulars of despair.

For those of us who fight *with* life, who align ourselves not against the plight of the infinite particulars of synthetic death but *with* the joy of life set free, the challenge is not to undo the false ecology of man. That is easy: break it. burn it. tear it down. The challenge is to feel life itself coursing through our veins in the act. to feel ourselves at one with the spirit of all that lives. It is difficult not because right action is here ambiguous or uncertain, but because life iLself is bigger than us, more vast even than our largest acts. And so we can never act *on behalf of* life, but always and only *as* life. Life knows death intimately, knows its cracks and fissures and weaknesses.

And it puts itself in all its forms against what needs undoing. Those who fight with life are made free by bursting forth as the vanguard of the real.

But this is not progress in the sense of the Progressives. We should not expect progress. Progress belongs to the

But the serious tone breaks into a laugh like grass in the cracks of a parking lot, as we look across the line we drew and see flowers growing up in winter. Because there is no progress to be made, we can declare victory before the battle. The fire that burns the false ecology to the ground is the warmth of the heart of life itself. The ashes that remain are the sacred transformation of death that we smear across our own bodies. There is no dialectic. There is no cause for hope or fear. There is only life — its winding, growing chains of limitless, free, self-liberating desire.

starting gate it was never placed in, but always seeks and always becomes better; a perfect imperfection that needs no perfecting because it grows ever more perfect by displaying ever more imperfection; an always present “not-yet.” We need not therefore concede, with Derrida, the apparent necessity of a humanist teleology, which, he would claim, “in spite of all the denegations or all the avoidances one could wish... has remained *up till* now... the price to be paid in the ethico-political denunciation of biologism, racism, naturalism, etc.”

III. The Beginningless War

I am afraid of the winter daffodils, angered by the decay and disorder they would carry. But there is a joy in them: in the midst of a senile season, I recognize that that which we hold dear has always already won. I know that the intimate encompassing of life in and for itself extends beyond the reach of the ecology of death. That its always-already won victory is an expression of its self-surrendering to its infinite not-yet. The forefront of life is the line we draw at the edge of death, saying “This far and no farther.”

time of false ecology, to the history of a world whose time has been made straight by the illusions of economy. The Earth has never known a line like that. Time is found in tendrils, in loops, in the movement of arcs and circles, ellipses, and continua. Space itself is open, free, and roiling, bent and moved by its own content, never lost to some illusion of immediate infinity but rather intimate and close and wild in an eros of and for itself. The history of the world is a spinning pulsation turning round an ellipse. It is vibrant and dynamic and cannot be regulated, controlled, or conditioned. Only the small particulars of death can be so constrained. And that is why the false ecology can only wield power by making use of death. It fights with death. We fight with life. It. We.

II. Against Bookchin

Bookchin buys into the time of the false ecology and thus into the myth of progress. Evolution is not progress, ecology is not progress, nor is history progress. The call he makes for a Kropotkinist social ecology is based in the neo-Aristotelian tradition of natural law. But nature has no laws or fixed agendas. It

is not normative or institutional, but purely decisional. Those patterns some might call laws are habits, are a form of the universe making love to itself. They are not laws. Nature is not legislated. It is a process of self-exploration, holding itself open to its own endless reordering and continual interrelation. It is not subject to law or to the exercise of sovereignty's sway over death. Life finds only life. We see in Bookchin the dialectics of his ideological leftism and of the false ecology that believes that time and space bring encounters with a reified death (the nonliving or inorganic, here, as objects for appropriation):

> *Put quite simply, ecology deals with the dynamic balance of nature, with the interdependence of living and nonliving things. Since nature also includes human beings, the science must include humanity's role in the natural world — specifically, the character, form, and structure of humanity's relationship with other species and with the inorganic substrate of the biotic environment. From a critical viewpoint, ecology opens to wide purview the vast disequilibrium that has emerged from humanity's split with the natural world. One of nature's very unique species, homo sapiens, has slowly and painstakingly developed from the natural world into a unique social world of its own. As both worlds interact with each other through highly complex*
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> *'althochdeutsch' (Old High German) meaning, fram, which, he says, 'properly means' (bedeutet eigentlich): to be on the way towards (unterwegs nach) elsewhere and forwards (anderswohin vorwärts), with the sense of destination (Bestimmung)rather than of wandering. And he concludes from this that, far from being exiled on the earth like a fallen stranger, the soul is on the way towards the earth: Die seele sucht die Erde erst, flieht sie nicht, the soul only seeks the earth, it does not flee it. The soul is a stranger because it does not yet inhabit the earth — rather as the word 'fremd' is strange because its meaning does not yet inhabit, because it no longer inhabits, its proper althochdeutsch place.*

Of course, with Bloch the Platonic echo returns even as it is submitted to counter-Utopian suspension. The *unentfremdetlichkeit* of Bloch's *vermitteltes Gut* is discovered in and as its proper expression as a good that is both more imminent and more constrained for its actualization. Because it is at one with life, the soul does not inhabit the earth. Cut off from being cut off, we are strangers to alienation. An always-already present and available relationship is discovered and made manifest as the making possible of an impossible relation, through the pressure of a disclosure of the good that can never be disclosed as *a* good: a temporally precessive amelioration that never improves, that never leaves a

locus for the manifestation of good-as-such in and as the manifestation of the historical subjectivity of humanity, in turn the carriers of social good. Thus nature is valuable in itself, not because of an anthropocentric ethic that sees it as the object of our respect, but because it is the primordial ground of relation itself in its dynamic possibility: *sie unentfremdet aufgeht, als vermitteltes Gut*.

One can hear here indirect echoes of Heidegger's "anti-Platonic" reading of the line from Trakl: "*Es ist die Seele ein Fremdes auf Erden*" ("Yes, the soul is a stranger upon the earth"). Derrida explains:

> *Heidegger immediately disqualifies any "Platonic" hearing of this. That the soul is a "stranger" does not signify that one must take it to be imprisoned, exiled, tumbled into the terrestrial here below, fallen into a body doomed to the corruption (Verwesen) of what is lacking in Being and in truth is not. Heidegger does thus indeed propose a change of meaning in the interpretation. This change of meaning goes against Platonism, comes down to an inversion, precisely, of meaning itself [le sens même], the direction or orientation of the soul's movement. This reversal of meaning — and of the meaning of meaning — passes in the first place through a listening to language. Heidegger first repatriates the word fremd from the German language, leading it back to its phases of evolution, it has become as important to speak of a social ecology as to speak of a natural ecology.*

The heroic narrative of the emergence of the human is amplified by the sense of scientific certainty about the nature, or at least sharp boundaries, of the human as a strictly differentiate species. Postulating a radical break between "nature" and the "social world," Bookchin proceeds to shore up this difference by articulating the relationship as mediated by "highly complex phases of evolution." The meaning of this latter phrase remains elusive at best, and we can only assume that he uses here an ecological flourish in order to generate a place-holder or stop-gap for a yet-to-be-theorized aspect of his theory.

Bookchin's attempt at an ecocentric posthumanism falls back into the categories of humanism's speciesist false ecology at precisely the moment we would wish it to be most powerful: in the presentation of its ethical scheme. Bookchin's largely negative critique of urbanity, counterbalanced with an aphoristic positive critique, romantic at best, cannot do much more than describe the boundaries of Aristotelian humanism as a kind of banal urbanity and then reorient the relationship between

culture and nature according to a “healthier” ethic of “respect for nature.” The lack of specificity in the determination of the moral patients for this ethic make Bookchin’s ethic seem unlikely to succeed. Moreover, without a critique of urbanity’s construction and determination of death as the form of its relation to life, it is difficult to see how the scenario that would provide for his ethic’s implementation in the first place could emerge.

This blind spot allows Bookchin to miss the profound sense in which Ernst Bloch. an early German Green thinker, identifies the problem scenario in a way not addressed in the Kropotkinist milieu, even though he cites the relevant passage:

> *Nature in its final manifestation, like history in its final manifestation, lies at the horizon of the future. The more a common technique [Allianztechnik] is attainable instead of one that is external — one that is mediated with the co-productivity [Mitproduktivität] of nature — the more we can be sure that the frozen powers of a frozen nature will again be emancipated. Nature is not something that can be consigned to the past. Rather it is the construction-site that has not yet been cleared, the building tools that have not yet been attained in an adequate form for the human house that itself does not yet exist in an adequate form. The ability of problem-laden natural subjectivity to participate in the construction of this house is the objective-utopian correlate of the human-utopian fantasy conceived in concrete terms. Therefore it is certain that the human house stands not only in history and on the ground of human activity; it stands primarily on the ground of a mediated natural subjectivity on the construction site of nature. Nature’s conceptual frontier [Grenzbegriff] is not the beginning of human history, where nature (which is always present in history and always surrounds it) turns into the site of the human sovereign realm [regnum hominis], but rather where it turns into the adequate site (for the adequate human house) as an unalienated mediated good [und sie unentfremdet aufgeht, als vermitteltes Gut].*

Bloch moves towards the posthumanistic at the instant Bookchin fails to do so. Bloch puts the nature of humanity, as self-constructing and self-mediating natural system, at risk in such a way that our relationship to nature is questioned not through a reorientation of the “human” (in a “natural state” or otherwise) toward nature, but through a redeployment of humanity itself as metaphor for its own way of being-related. In this view, an ethic is implied that sees “nature” as inherently good because it is the ahistorical